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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001489

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SUBJECT: UZBEKS PROPOSE JOINT HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE

Classified By: CDA Brad Hanson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (U) This message contains a guidance request. Please see para 6.

12. (C) Uzbekistan's Regional Policy Foundation has proposed a human rights conference to Post as the means to nudge the bilateral relationship back on track. The Foundation's director said the conference had been vetted and approved at the "top" of the Uzbek government and provided a list of officials, including a Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, who would participate. He said that the first step was for relevant parties to sign a Memorandum of Understanding, which would allow conference planning to go forward. Post found the document largely unobjectionable, but declined to sign it based on the time necessary to gain authorization to do so. The foundation director subsequently told us that the Foundation was prepared to wait as long as necessary. During our conversation, it became relatively clear that the director has been instructed from above to hold a conference with U.S. involvement. The October time frame, right at the start of the expected presidential election campaign and around the time the European Union will review its sanctions against Uzbekistan, is not coincidental.

The Government of Uzbekistan will use any such meeting to score maximum public relations points. At the same time, Post is intrigued by the possibility that the government may intend the proposal as a genuine opening to the United States. USAID has given two U.S. nongovernmental organizations the green light to move forward with developing a conference agenda and list of proposed participants. Absent specific instructions from Washington to do so, however, Post will decline to sign the memorandum or otherwise officially sponsor the conference. End summary.

A Conference is the Key

13. (SBU) On August 7 and August 10, A/DCM (also USAID Country Representative) and Poloff met with Regional Policy Foundation Director Sayfiddin Jurayev at his request to discuss a proposed joint human rights conference in October. Jurayev claimed that the Foundation, which was started in 2004, is one of only two "nongovernmental organizations" in Uzbekistan working on national security issues. (Note: The other being the Institute for Strategic Studies. End note.) The foundation mostly deals with political issues in South

and Central Asia and organizes conferences with academic institutions, other NGOs, and international organizations. Jurayev repeatedly claimed that his organization is independent from the government, even going so far on two occasions to say that the Foundation can disagree with the government on some, unspecified, issues. Despite the claimed independence, however, Jurayev said that the Foundation's activities have the support of senior government leaders and "have political significance." Jurayev pointed to a conference the Foundation sponsored in early 2006 on the Russia-Uzbekistan relationship, which he said culminated in an unplanned meeting between Russian participants and President Karimov, and which he claimed was key to strengthening relations between the two countries.

14. (SBU) According to Jurayev, the Foundation wants to organize a similar conference on American-Uzbek relations and human rights issues. (Note: Jurayev first proposed the idea of such a conference to the Open Dialogue Project and National Democratic Institute in late July, but was told that Post's approval was required before those organizations would move forward. End note.) Jurayev said that the proposed conference would help to nudge the U.S.-Uzbekistan bilateral relationship back on track. He acknowledged that there are issues of disagreement between the countries, but said that he thinks it is time for the two sides to come together to talk about where there has been progress and where there is a need for more improvements. Isolating Uzbekistan from the international community is not a good option for either side, he said.

15. (SBU) A/DCM agreed that more discussion on issues of concerns is needed, but suggested that it would be more productive to hold a series of smaller, more focused events. Jurayev responded that such a series of events could take place after the first conference, which he said needed to be

TASHKENT 00001489 002 OF 002

more significant to kick things off. Jurayev handed over a list (Note: Sent to SCA/CEN. End note.) of 17 Government of Uzbekistan officials that he said would participate in the conference. The list included Deputy Prime Minister Azimov, Foreign Minister Norov, former Foreign Minister Safaev. Responding to Poloff's question, Jurayev said that he was 100 percent sure these officials would be allowed to participate.

He later expanded on this statement by saying that the conference had been vetted and approved "at the top" of the Uzbek government.

16. (SBU) Jurayev said that the conference would set the stage for a new bilateral relationship. He suggested that the planning stage start with the signing of a five party Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Foundation, U.S. Embassy, USAID, Open Dialogue Project, and National Democratic Institute. Late in the day on August 10, Jurayev sent a draft MOU, which Post has sent to SCA/CEN. Post reviewed the document and found it to be generally unobjectionable; however, we informed Jurayev that it likely would take a significant amount of time to receive authorization to sign such a document and suggested that it go forward as a three party agreement among the nongovernmental organizations. On August 14, Jurayev told us that the Foundation was prepared to wait as long as needed for the Embassy and USAID to be able to sign the MOU as the document forms the basis of long-term cooperation between the Foundation and the Embassy and is needed to allow the Foundation to work with Post.

Comment and Guidance Request

17. (C) Despite Jurayev's claims to independence from the government, it is reasonably clear that he has been instructed from above to hold the proposed conference. He does not seem to have a clear purpose in mind, beyond vague

promises of setting the stage for a better relationship, and it may well be that holding the conference is the end the Uzbeks seek. The proposed time frame for the conference, at the start of the expected presidential election campaign and around the time that the European Union will review its sanctions against Uzbekistan, is not coincidental. Still, we are intrigued, although a bit skeptical, by the possibility that the proposal is intended as a genuine opening towards the United States. USAID had given the Open Dialogue Project and National Democratic Institute the green light to work with Jurayev in further developing the conference agenda and participant list.

¶18. (C) As noted above, Post's review of Jurayev's draft MOU found it to be very general and mostly unobjectionable. We are not inclined to sign the document, however. Were we to sign such an agreement, which, at least in its initial draft, referred to the desires of both countries for a better relationship, we think it should be with the Government of Uzbekistan directly. To do otherwise sets the precedent of allowing the GOU to engage us indirectly using a nominal nongovernmental organization as a cut out. Absent instructions from Washington to do otherwise, we will decline to sign the draft Memorandum of Understanding.

Bio Note

¶19. (SBU) Sayfiddin Jurayev, an ethnic Uzbek, was born in 1960 in Bukhara Province. A Doctor of Political Science, Jurayev graduated from Tashkent State University in 1984. As a researcher at Uzbekistan's Institute of Strategic Studies, he participated in several conferences abroad, including an eight month fellowship at George Washington University in 2002, following which he wrote a 500-page book, in Uzbek, on the United States' political, legal, social, and economic structures. Jurayev left the Institute of Strategic Studies in 2004 to take over the newly created Regional Policy Foundation.
HANSON